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SUBJECT: GEORGIA: FIRST H1N1 DEATHS REPORTED; PUBLIC
CONCERNED

¶1. (U) Summary. Georgia reported its first confirmed deaths due to H1N1 the week of December 14. As of December 16, there are five confirmed deaths. The reported number of confirmed and unconfirmed H1N1 cases vary widely among the different sources. The reported confirmed cases range from 530 to 635, while the unconfirmed cases range from 1,500 to 1,750; the National Center for Disease Control (NCDC) estimates a rate of unconfirmed cases as 435 per 100,000 people. There is a growing concern among the population which is being fueled by the constant media reports about H1N1; however, thus far there is no sense of panic with schools open and no lines at local pharmacies. Nonetheless, some parents are keeping their children home from school and some Georgians have started wearing medical face masks as a preventative measure. Opposition politicians are making public statements about the "outbreak" and are calling on the government to declare a state of emergency, close schools and start issuing free medical care to those with H1N1. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) Comment. Concern has risen with the first deaths reported in Georgia from H1N1, but there is no sense of panic. Health Unit visits to local hospitals and clinics have seen an increase in the number of patients. The Embassy community has seen a rising number of patients sick with flu-like symptoms, ranging from mild to moderate, but so far, none have tested positively for H1N1. The Embassy community has remained calm, but is keeping an eye on local conditions. We continue to review our pandemic tripwires and update them as necessary. End Comment.

¶3. (U) As of Wednesday, December 16, there have been five confirmed deaths from H1N1 in Georgia. Georgia's NCDC has confirmed the five deaths and reports that there are now 635 confirmed cases in country. The five deaths reported were in the following cities: one in Kutaisi, two in Batumi and two in Tbilisi. The NCDC estimated the unconfirmed rate is 435 cases per 100,000 people. This rate is calculated at the end of every week with the last calculation undertaken December 11. According to USAID's Office of Health and Social Development, as of December 15, 530 cases have been confirmed with around 1,500 unconfirmed cases of flu-like symptoms. The Georgian Ministry of Health reported that there are 1,750 unconfirmed cases; the Georgian press is reporting over 530 cases of H1N1 with the unconfirmed cases to be over 1,700.

¶4. (U) The deaths have raised the level of concern among the general population, although there are no signs of panic. Some parents are choosing to keep their children at home rather than sending them to school. This has caused some schools to close due to the lack of students, but there has been no Government decision to close schools. Opposition politicians are calling on the government to issue a state of emergency, are demanding that all schools be closed and proposing free medical treatment for all with flu-like symptoms. The Georgian media has reported that the high cost of Tamiflu, 50 lari (about 30 dollars), may be keeping people from purchasing the medicine; there are also rumors circulating that there might be a shortage of the medicine

and of medical face masks, increasing the anxiety of local residents. The Ministry of Health is urging citizens with flu-like symptoms to wash their hands often, isolate those that are sick, wear masks while in public and seek medical help sooner rather than later. The Ministry of Health has not called for school closings, have not issued a state of emergency because the numbers are still rather low and claim to be well stocked with Tamiflu and that hospitals are ready.

¶5. (U) Press reports from Abkhazia have further added to Georgian public concerns. According to the press, in Sukhumi, de facto authorities have declared a state of emergency in Abkhazia and have closed all schools due to H1N1. They report that over 200 people have been hospitalized, but the hospitals lack the necessary equipment to treat the patients properly and there are no reliable estimates available of the number infected. Russia has promised to provide assistance and Georgia has also offered medical help.

¶6. (SBU) Among the American Embassy community, around 50 Americans and about 20 Foreign Service Nationals have reported to the Health Unit with mild to moderate flu-like symptoms or upper respiratory symptoms, but none have tested as or been confirmed as H1N1. Although some in the Embassy community have expressed concern, the atmosphere remains calm.
BASS